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Information evaluation: AmeStat program designed for accurate analysis

By **Kevin Doyle**/ kdoyle@cnc.com

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The term "AmeStat" first worked its way into the local political lexicon during last year's mayoral campaign when then candidate Thatcher Kezer brought it up during a number of pre-election interviews.

Now, with Kezer a year removed from his election as Amesbury's fourth Mayor and in the midst of refining his proposal for a Charter-mandated reorganization of the Executive branch, AmeStat is the new measuring stick for productivity and accountability in government operations.

Just what is AmeStat? How does it work? And of what benefit is it to the community?

The concept was introduced in 1994 when the New York City Police Department implemented its Computerized Statistics (ComStat) program with twice-weekly crime control strategy meetings. Television fans may recall that the Washington, D.C.-based police drama "The District" utilized ComStat sessions in its story lines.

The NYPD's objective was to increase the flow of information between the department's executives and its field commanders with particular emphasis on the concentration of crime. Providing accurate intelligence allowed the NYPD to employ effective tactics. ComStat also allowed for continuing monitoring and assessment.

A modified version of the program has been implemented in a number of municipalities as a means of overseeing operations. Kezer's AmeStat initiative is modeled after the SomerStat program already up and running in Somerville under the administration of Mayor Joe Curtatone.

According to the Somerville Web site, "The SomerStat program facilitates very regular forums in which key city decision-makers meet to study financial, personnel and operational data to understand what's happening within departments. In these forums, we identify opportunities for improvement and, over time, track implementation of plans. The meetings have become a kind of ongoing conversation among city leaders on where the city should be headed, with each meeting allowing city managers to better understand how the city can work better."

AmeStat is part and parcel of the proposed functional organization under Mayor Kezer's Executive Reorganization Plan. Five AmeStat groupings have been identified: Public Safety, Health and Human Services, Administration and Finance, Community Development/Inspectional Services and Engineering/Public Works. Two of the five - Engineering/Public Works and Public Safety - are already up and running.

"The program utilizes spreadsheets, charts and graphs. In Somerville, they've taken the approach where you first start generating data and information and then report on it bi-weekly," Kezer said.

"A key is determining what statistics we need to be collecting. This program provides accountability throughout the system and forces department heads to gather the information. We're able to develop metrics and it also provides an opportunity for advocacy. The data will show us where we need to spend money and where we need more services," he said. "It will better prepare us to meet the challenges of the future."

Some departments will be asked to provide information every two weeks while others will provide data on a monthly basis. Mayoral Chief of Staff Kendra Amaral will oversee collection and interpretation of raw data.

"The reaction I've had from department heads is that they're glad people are interested and

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want to know what it is that they're doing," said Amaral.

Mayor Kezer and Mayor Curtatone of Somerville have been asked to make a joint presentation of their programs at the Massachusetts Municipalities Association's (MMA) Conference in January.






The mayor said the implementation of AmeStat will allow him to achieve a long-range goal.

"As long as I'm in this office, it's my goal to improve performance throughout town and to make Amesbury a benchmark of how other communities ought to do business," he said.

Once presented to the Municipal Council, the Council has 30 days to either approve or reject the Executive Reorganization Plan but it cannot make changes. If the Council takes no action after 30 days, the plan takes effect automatically.

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